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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Stauffer, Russell G.

Action Research in L.E.A. Instructional Procedures

Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware, 1976. Pp. 305.

Contact is the basic word in education. It means that the teacher must relate himself to his students not as one brain to other brains—a well-developed brain to still undeveloped ones—but as one being to other beings; What is required is not merely a search for information from below and a handing down of information from above, nor a mere interchange of questions and answers, but a genuine dialogue into which the teacher must enter directly and unselfconsciously¹

If ever there were a teaching method tailor-made for “genuine dialogue” between and among teachers and learners, it is epitomized by instructional procedures of the language-experience approach. As reported in this publication, action research in this area demonstrates this repeatedly. In the first section of the volume, Stauffer discusses the dimensions of a sound reading program leading to high competencies in responsible choices for “freedoms of self, of a scholar, of a citizen and of mankind.” Here, he advances certain convictions about the characteristics of the reading process, and practices which further its effective development, mastery, and utilization. Over and over again, through such phrases as “evaluate process,” “active searching and decision making,” “continuous reciprocity of language and thought,” and “functional contexts” of concept and language learning, he emphasizes that acquiring the cognitive skills necessary to attain the versatile reading achievements of a scholar requires competent instruction, constant interaction, and conscientious, intentional study. Everywhere, today, teachers are faced with more and greater pressures to *push*, for completion of schedules; to *produce*, for compilation of scores; to *perform*, for competitive scrutiny; and to *prove* that standard curriculum by fiat produces popular scholarship. To help their students achieve high competencies, reading teachers must be able to distinguish between methods based upon sound, compatible pedagogy and philosophy, and those dictated by the time-consuming trivialities of many of the newer, basal “delivery and management systems.” This author provides good direction for determining where/how to delegate priorities of teaching time and energy so that these two precious elements will be conserved and enhanced, not wasted nor diminished, and so that the mind-nourishing, thinking process of reading may not be sacrificed upon the altar of

¹ Martin Buber. *The Way of Response*, p. 94. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

ephemeral success in completion of the next level text/workbook. To this end, Stauffer sets forth certain convictions:

1. The reading process is akin to the thinking process. Cognitive actions required in the fruitful search for meaning constitute the most striking features of the process;
2. Command of the reading-thinking process is developed best in the dynamics of a group situation. Actions involving searching and decision making are focused on cognitive enrichment, with resulting development of processes of thinking and logical methods of inquiry;
3. Group directed reading-thinking activities provide the group with useful ways of behaving, helping the individual members to know themselves and their limitations, and to be self-generative in their learning;
4. Utilizing the principles and practices associated with the structured, multivariied and adaptive language-experience approach is the best way to take advantage of the linguistic, experiential and cognitive maturity that children possess. Through these functional strategies children acquire word recognition and comprehension power; they also learn to transfer these powers successfully to many printed sources;
5. The school library, together with public libraries and classroom libraries, must provide the hub of a sound reading instruction program. These multi-media centers have the potential to capture interest and to promote a taste for the desire to read;
6. To read is to comprehend and to manipulate concepts; therefore, concept development is of primary importance in reading instruction. Concepts are not acquired by explanations and memorization, but through experiencing them in their functional contexts; and
7. The efficient reader is the versatile reader. Sound and thorough reading instruction, with purposes for reading as the principal determiners, will demand decisions on adjustment of rate; rate of comprehension becomes more important than rate of reading.

Recognition of the foregoing components and provision for their inclusion/facilitation in the reading program, not on a short term basis, but across the years, will help children acquire and refine their cognitive skills. Thus, may their minds grow to the "disciplined and dignified, competent and productive, vigilant and independent." In such an instructional setting, much is required of teachers in terms of time, competencies, personal involvement, confidence, and energy spent on improvement of classroom learning, which, in itself, is a just reward.

To be effective, teachers and others interested in improving classroom instruction in the reading-thinking processes must work through first-hand

classroom experiences—examining, altering, and refining the dynamics of instruction. It is that kind of action research, carried on by teachers in the field, in actual schools and classrooms throughout the country that are reported in this volume. Other teachers may find these descriptions helpful and stimulating, even desirable for replication. Instructors in reading clinics/teacher-training institutions should find many ideas here to discuss and explore.

The author and compiler of this text admits that research reported here represents functional, rather than final, truths. Nevertheless, he maintains that certain trends established in some of the studies have important implications; at the same time, he suggests that what is needed are more and varied studies in many of these same areas. Perhaps, there are even larger goals at stake than heretofore realized, or even suspected. One of the most intriguing bits in the whole text is the short report of the C. vanEyck Grobler study regarding channeling of aggression. It arouses speculation as to what other areas of social thinking/behavior might be influenced by the L.E.A. approach, implemented through Directed Reading-Thinking Activity procedures. How is freedom of critical thinking that involves active participation of the thinking subject related to social thinking and social reality? The one crucial variable in all the important reading research burgeoning out of the federal grants to education in the sixties and early seventies was a human factor, the teacher. It may be that the most significant result of teaching cognitive skills for independent, disciplined decision-making is to make it possible for masses of people to live on this earth and enjoy life together as fully valued human beings.

. . . . our intellect is not meant to stop working when it comes to social relations an intellectual development that stops short of the social reality is bound to be experienced today as incomplete and irrelevant.

Education for thinking, therefore, has as its most important indirect goal helping individuals to take an active, intelligent part in shaping the life of society, from personal relations within a family to attitudes toward people living in other countries and under different social systems. As with other activities, the age range of the elementary school period is a most necessary and at the same time a most promising period for laying the foundation of social thinking.²

² Hans G. Furth, *Piaget for Teachers*, pp. 129 and 130. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.